

Improving the Fitness Report Program

1. We are making minor changes in the Fitness Report to implement improved career selection procedures and the PERFIT sub-system of SIPS. This is an opportune time to effect certain other improvements in the program as well.

a. The Fitness Report Program is deficient in that it denies employees access to the comments of their reviewing officials. Most experienced employees will have seen Fitness Reports wherein the official evaluation of performance as recorded and understood by an employee and his supervisor has been altered significantly and without their knowledge by the comments of the reviewing official concerned. Thus, this very important information becomes immediately available to all who have access to the official record, but is denied to the employee for whom it is of greatest concern. Sometimes this practice has been defended on grounds that an employee should not know the reviewing official's comments about his potential or how the reviewing official evaluates the liberality or strictness of the rater. It has also been said that the comments of reviewing officials would be less objective and candid if they knew that the employees concerned would see them. These arguments do not hold water. An employee should see the official evaluation of his performance and any remarks concerning his potential as recorded on his Fitness Report by both his rating and reviewing officers; and, the comments of one should be no less forthright than those of the other. Furthermore, current instructions that the reviewing official should comment upon the "liberality or strictness of the rater" seem out of order. Such comment does not belong in the Fitness Report on the employee being rated. Presumably, both rating and reviewing officials record their honest evaluations, and there is legitimate room for differences between them.

Recommendation: The Fitness Report format should be rearranged to make the employee's certification the last item on the form and have it cover the entries in all parts of the form, including the comments of the reviewing official.

b. The Fitness Report System should go further than it does to encourage employees' participation in the evaluation process. Although current instructions provide that "the person being rated may attach a memorandum concerning any part of the Report," the statement is more or less buried among other items of instruction. It would improve the system to include a more positive statement of encouragement on the Fitness Report form itself. This would offer

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some response to the frequently expressed complaint that management lacks interest in employees' views concerning their work arrangements and their aspirations for career development.

Recommendation: The Fitness Report form should be revised to include a statement inviting the employee to attach as part of the official record a memorandum including any comments he wishes to make about his performance evaluation, his work situation, or his interests in career development.

c. The sometime practice of marking Fitness Reports prepared in particular components in some manner to suggest that they are truly "objective" and "valid" serves no useful purpose and should be discontinued. There is no evidence that Reports prepared in any particular component are in fact more reliable than those prepared elsewhere.

Recommendation: Agency officials should be instructed not to mark Fitness Reports to suggest that the evaluations therein are characterized by special objectivity or validity.

2. With your approval, the Director of Personnel will initiate action to implement the above recommendations.